

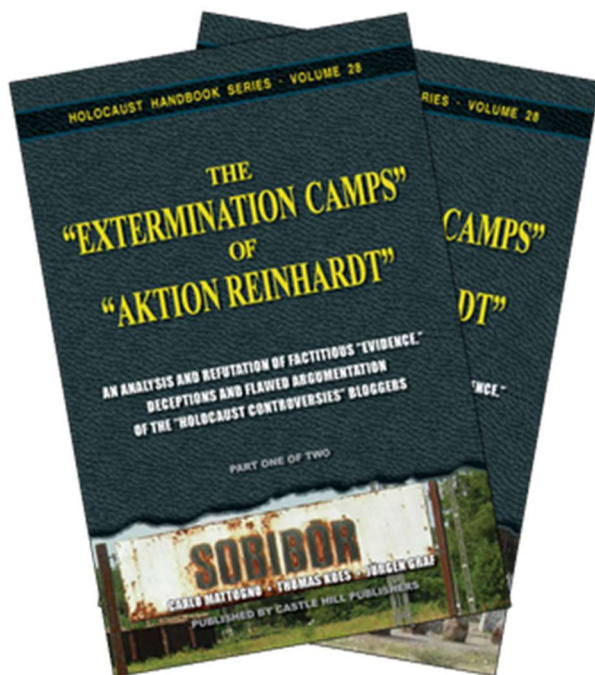
The "Extermination Camps" of "Aktion Reinhardt"

Book Reviews

[Friedrich Jansson](#)

Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka. Holocaust Denial and Operation Reinhard: A Critique of the Falsehoods of Mattogno, Graf and Kues, by Jonathan Harrison, Roberto Muehlenkamp, Jason Myers, Sergey Romanov, and Nicholas Terry, Holocaust Controversies; 2011, 570 pp.

The "Extermination Camps" of "Aktion Reinhardt": An Analysis and Refutation of Factitious "Evidence," Deceptions and Flawed Argumentation of the "Holocaust Controversies" Bloggers, by Carlo Mattogno, Thomas Kues, and Juergen Graf, Castle Hill Publishers, Uckfield, UK; 2013, 1385 pp.



The "Extermination Camps" of "Aktion Reinhardt"
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Like other intellectual movements, Holocaust revisionism has advanced in responding to challenges. Revisionist scholarship on Auschwitz, for example, advanced immensely in the course of responding to the challenges contained in the writings of Jean-Claude Pressac. [\[1\]](#) Yet in the Holocaust debate, this kind of fruitful discussion has been very much the exception to the rule. More often than not, the Holocaust establishment has preferred to avoid confrontation, saying that debate would give "deniers" legitimacy.

This avoidance of confrontation has become particularly pronounced in recent years. After the publication of a number of works in connection with the Irving/Lipstadt trial, scholarly anti-revisionism has maintained careful silence for a full decade, while over the same period revisionist scholars have produced a steady stream of detailed studies on core aspects of the Holocaust. The main exception to this silence has been a team of bloggers calling themselves "Holocaust Controversies." The first of the two works reviewed here is their first publication in non-blog format. Published in December 2011, it is a

lengthy attack on three revisionist books,^[2] namely the monographs on Treblinka, Belzec, and Sobibor written by Carlo Mattogno, Jürgen Graf, and Thomas Kues, whose reply to this criticism forms the second work under review.

The Bloggers' Critique

"Your manuscript is both good and original. But the part that is good is not original, and the part that is original is not good." This remark, commonly attributed to Samuel Johnson, might well be applied to the bloggers' work. Loosely speaking, one might call its earlier chapters "good", while its latter chapters could qualify as "original". Although the term "good" is much too generous, the early chapters are at least fairly extensively sourced, and grounded in a large literature. The bloggers' work begins outside the Reinhardt camps with broad generalities, then moves inside the camps to address more specific concerns. In the early chapters, in particular those dealing with National Socialist Jewish policy in general and shootings in the occupied eastern territories in particular, they are able to draw on an extensive secondary literature. While the extensive material derived from the secondary literature does give these chapters a certain weight, they have little to offer the reader already familiar with recent overviews such as Christopher Browning's *The Origins of the Final Solution* or Peter Longerich's *Holocaust* – little, that is, aside from a large trove of errors and misinterpretations.

While the bloggers' early chapters are mainly devoted to regurgitating the contents of standard books and document collections, the subsequent chapters contain more original material. In particular, the final two chapters, which deal with mass graves and cremation, are without question the most detailed treatment of these topics in the orthodox literature. The bloggers – or rather Roberto Muehlenkamp, who is the author of the chapters in question – deserve great credit for acknowledging these essential issues. In this, they stand head and shoulders above other traditionalist holocaust scholars who have written on the Reinhardt camps.

This *originality*, however, is coupled with a remarkable lack of *quality*. While Muehlenkamp fills his chapters with enough tables to intimidate the average innumerate historian, any reader who acquaints himself with the literature on mass burial and cremation will easily see through his compendium of wishful thinking, numerical legerdemain, and willful ignorance. Muehlenkamp's obfuscations may fool some readers for a time, but he has embroiled himself in an argument which he will inevitably lose, and which is absolutely fatal for the standard Reinhardt story.

Putting issues of content aside, the bloggers' style deserves comment. As their introduction explains, their work originated in preparations for an (unrealized) online debate about *Aktion* Reinhardt. This heritage shows itself very clearly throughout their work. Although it is informed by recent scholarship, its style is a return to the methods of the Nuremberg trials. Rhetoric is given priority over rigor, the authors taking their stylistic cues more from lawyers than scholars. Although it does contain a number of detailed criticisms of revisionist arguments, the bloggers' work is really not structured as a critique of the three books it purports to attack. Like the politician who knows never to give a direct answer to a hostile question but to deflect it with a statement of his own, the bloggers prefer to minimize the time spent in direct confrontation with opposing arguments in favor of caricatures, misrepresentations, and sneers. Such devices serve lawyers and debaters well, but will not impress serious readers. Yet despite all of its weaknesses, the bloggers' work is essential reading for revisionists with an interest in the Reinhardt camps: the criticism serves to focus the mind, and one's arguments are bound to be improved in the process of testing them against opposition.

The reply of Mattogno, Graf, and Kues

In the conclusion to their white paper, the bloggers posed a challenge, writing that “we would like to set some provisions required for us to take any ‘riposta’ into serious consideration [...] we dare MGK [Mattogno, Graf, and Kues] to follow the structure of the present critique, so as to put things in proper perspective.” The second work under review was clearly influenced by a desire to answer this challenge. After two introductory chapters, it replies chapter by chapter: Chapters 3 and 4 reply to the bloggers' Chapter 1, while Chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8 reply to the bloggers' Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5, respectively. Chapters 9 and 10 reply to the bloggers' Chapter 6, while Chapters 11 and 12 respond to the bloggers' chapters 7 and 8.

The reply is extremely detailed, and parts of it mark a major advance for revisionism with respect to the Reinhardt camps. It examines new sources, polishes old arguments, and introduces new ones. Unfortunately, it does not do so in a manner likely to reach many readers. It suffers, in short, from a lack of attention to presentation. One senses that the bloggers approached the writing of their “critique” with eagerness and polished it carefully as a team, whereas their opponents appear, for the most part, to have seen their reply as a tedious chore. Large parts of it were clearly written irritably and in haste. This fact, coupled with the severe limitations of revisionist manpower and organization in translation and editing, have caused this work to be published in a rather unpolished state. These defects amount to little more than growing pains for scholarly revisionism on the Reinhardt camps, but they nonetheless do detract from the work, and open the door to easy polemical replies.

The lack of attention to presentation is particularly apparent in the work's conclusion, which seems to have been written in an irritable mood early in the process of responding, and never rewritten in light of the response's eventual content. Unlike the bloggers, who use their conclusion in the manner of a lawyer's summation, Graf wastes his on name-calling and insults. Given that the introduction and conclusion will have far more readers than will the full work, this is a highly unfortunate lapse.

The separate contributions of the individual authors are written in quite different styles. Graf engages in an aggressive polemic, focusing more on attack than defense. Mattogno's style is the opposite: extensively sectioned, with each section beginning with a quotation from the work of his opponents, followed by his reply. While this style allows for highly specific point-for-point argument, it leads to a work lacking in synthesis because it does not impose its own organization on the material. As the number of points considered moves from the dozens into the hundreds, the point-by-point style becomes, as far as exposition and pedagogy are concerned, a disaster. Mattogno's extremely lengthy reply contains some highly interesting new material, and an engagement with a number of new sources, but its arrangement is such that only highly motivated readers already familiar with previous revisionist studies will be able to dig out the new and interesting parts. Because he chooses to reply even to many minor points made by his critics, his substantial new arguments and sources are diluted by much less compelling sections, and his major points obscured by his unwillingness to drop minor points. There are some significant advances here in content, but it will take considerable patience to find them in the extremely lengthy text.

The above mentioned facts severely limit this work's audience. That said, the first four chapters are considerably more polished than the rest of the work, and should reach a wider readership. Thomas Kues's contributions also stand out as readable, substantial, and well structured. Striking a stylistic middle ground between Graf and Mattogno, they can stand on their own.

One aspect which deserves special comment is the question of plagiarism, which Mattogno in particular repeatedly charges to the bloggers. Many of these charges are clearly accurate. That said, the frequent appearance of charges of plagiarism throughout the work becomes highly repetitious, especially as some of these accusations are either doubtful or clearly mistaken. Mattogno seems to have gotten somewhat carried away after having seen so many clear cases of plagiarism, including many from his own work, and started to see plagiarism in every corner. These false charges detract both from the readability of the text and from the impact of those accusations of plagiarism which are in fact true. In this, as in other things, an editor with a firmer hand could have greatly improved the work.

New aspects

The greater part of both works under review is spent rediscussing old material and arguments. While in some cases the rehashing of these familiar topics has refined the arguments, these aspects are likely to be incomprehensible to readers who have not carefully studied earlier writings on these subjects. There are, however, some elements which stand out in their novelty. The most prominent of the points on which the bloggers present us with something new is their attempt to change the killing method at Belzec and Treblinka from the traditional diesel exhaust to gasoline-engine exhaust. Given that anti-revisionists have spent nearly three decades insisting that, contra revisionist claims, diesel exhaust is a perfectly practical killing method, this marks an important backing-down. Their case for gasoline engines at these camps is not particularly compelling nor honest in its treatment of the witnesses, but the bloggers at least show the possibility of attempting such a line of argument. It will be interesting to see whether more prominent orthodox Holocaust scholars follow suit.

In dealing with this and other issues, the bloggers have made use of Soviet interrogations that other authors have chosen not to use. Two cases in particular stand out: the use of Nikolai Shalayev and Ivan Shevchenko to support the idea of the use of a gasoline engine for gassing at Treblinka, and the use of Pavel Leleko to support the idea that the Treblinka cremation facilities were equipped with pits. But introducing these materials introduces problems which the bloggers do not discuss. According to the bloggers' given source,[\[3\]](#) Leleko claimed that the gassing engine was a diesel, contradicting their argument that it was a gasoline engine. In fact, in the same source Leleko indicates that there were two engines used for gassing, occupying two of the ten chambers in the new gas-chamber building – contrary to the usual depiction, which has ten chambers used for gassing and the engine in a separate room. Shevchenko gives yet another version of the layout, with nine chambers used for gassing and one for an engine.[\[4\]](#)

The testimony of Shalayev is no less problematic. He claimed that the new gas-chamber building at Treblinka was equipped with five gas chambers, rather than the ten which has been generally accepted. He also described a curious procedure by which gassing in the old gas-chamber building proceeded one chamber at a time – a feature that contradicts the accounts of other witnesses. Finally, Leleko,[\[5\]](#) Shalayev,[\[6\]](#) and Shevchenko,[\[7\]](#) all claimed that the new gas chambers were built in 1943 (Shevchenko specifying March 1943), while the standard literature claims that they came under construction in late August or early September of 1942, and went into action that October or November. The bloggers, always superficial in their handling of witness testimony, make no attempts to reconcile any of these contradictions.

The many incremental refinements of old arguments aside, the main new elements in Mattogno, Graf, and Kues's reply come from examining a number of new sources, and from the ongoing progress of

archaeological work. Thomas Kues's lengthy examination of the new archeological findings at Sobibor is of particular interest. Another fascinating new element is Carlo Mattogno's discovery of Yankiel Wiernik's draft for *A Year in Treblinka* and its story of killing with chlorine, which was dropped in the published version. Unfortunately, these and many other interesting new elements tend to be obscured by the very length of the point-by-point replies.

Looking ahead

What's next in this debate? The bloggers have indicated that they will produce a new edition of their work, but not a direct reply. This evasion is unfortunate, and highlights their overarching focus on rhetoric: they would be unable to maintain their rhetorical momentum and polemical style in a direct reply, and therefore they avoid such an encounter. But just as the bloggers dictated a series of conditions necessary for them to take a revisionist response to their work into consideration, so too must they meet certain standards if they expect their updated work to be taken seriously. First, their work must actually be about the camps Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka. For them to write another work that shirks discussing the camps themselves in favor of building a circumstantial case that they “must have been” extermination centers equipped with homicidal gas chambers on the basis of events that took place far outside the camps will be, to borrow one of the bloggers' favorite phrases, an automatic fail.

Second, the bloggers must grapple in an upfront fashion with the fatal technical challenges to the Reinhardt story, in particular the problem of cremation, and with the results of archeology with respect to building remains and mass graves. A response that confines these vital topics to isolated chapters at the end of the book will be inadequate. Such an arrangement relies on the fact that most readers will not read as far as the final chapters, and most of those who do will be sufficiently ignorant of the topics under discussion as to be intimidated by a collection of extensive tables. Rather, the critical technical and archeological aspects of the story of burial, exhumation, and cremation must be put front and center throughout the discussion of the camps and of eyewitness testimony. Nothing less will do.

Third, they must deal in an open and upfront fashion with their many serious errors, acknowledging them in public fashion. Moreover, they must deal openly with their dishonest use of sources. It will not suffice to refute certain erroneous accusations of plagiarism, or to quietly amend errors without acknowledging them. Rather, the bloggers must openly discuss the strongest and best substantiated accusations of plagiarism. Similarly, they must openly admit their numerous errors and discuss them in a transparent fashion, just as they asked their opponents to do.

Unfortunately, it seems unlikely that any of these desiderata will be satisfied. More likely, the bloggers will simply troll through books and document collections for more *Einsatzgruppen* and policy documents they can add to their early chapters (while claiming to have seen the documents in an archive, of course), stuff in as many secondary sources as they can to pad their bibliography, take some steps to cover the tracks of their extensive copying, and claim all the while that their massive citation fraud is simply the result of a few mistakes. They will retain their strategy of trying to prove gassings by talking about shootings. And their coverage of the critical issues of mass graves and cremation will remain confined to isolated chapters, and will remain totally inadequate.

All the same, the bloggers deserve real credit for their work, which has so graphically illustrated the bankruptcy of the traditional Reinhardt story in the face of archeology and the realities of mass cremation, and provided a stimulus for the continued improvement of revisionist scholarship.

Notes:

- [1] Early responses: Mark Weber, *Journal of Historical Review (JHR)* Vol. 10, No. 2; Carlo Mattogno, *JHR* Vol. 10, No. 4; Robert Faurisson, *JHR* Vol. 11, No. 1 and *JHR* Vol. 11, No. 2; Arthur Butz, *JHR* Vol. 13, No. 3. An intermediate phase: Germar Rudolf (ed.), *Auschwitz: Plain Facts* (Chicago: Theses & Dissertations Press, 2005) [first published in 1995]. Most recent and comprehensive: Carlo Mattogno, *Auschwitz: The Case for Sanity: A Historical and Technical Study of Jean-Claude Pressac's "Criminal Traces" and Robert Jan van Pelt's "Convergence of Evidence,"* (Washington DC: The Barnes Review, 2010).
- [2] Jürgen Graf, Thomas Kues, Carlo Mattogno, *Sobibor. Holocaust Propaganda and Reality* (Washington DC: The Barnes Review, 2010); Carlo Mattogno, *Belzec in Propaganda, Testimonies, Archeological Research and History* (Chicago: Theses & Dissertations Press, 2004); Carlo Mattogno, Jürgen Graf, *Treblinka: Extermination Camp or Transit Camp?* (Chicago: Theses & Dissertations Press, 2004).
- [3] Interrogation of 20 February 1945, in English translation at <http://www.nizkor.org/ftp.cgi/camps/aktion.reinhard/treblinka/leleko.001>
- [4] Interrogation of 8 September 1944.
- [5] Interrogation of 20 February 1945, in English translation at <http://www.nizkor.org/ftp.cgi/camps/aktion.reinhard/treblinka/leleko.001>
- [6] Interrogation of 18 December 1950.
- [7] Interrogation of 8 September 1944.

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